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ABSTRACT

Educators are commonly undereducated and underinformed about the laws affecting public education. This paper explores the extent of this sad situation. A review of research studies analyzing the relationship of an educator's attitudes or perceptions of the law with their actual knowledge of it shows a positive correlation between attitudes toward corporal punishment and knowledge of related laws among Texas school principals. Educators confirm this need to improve their legal knowledge base through self-reflection. Other areas requiring shoring up of the legal knowledge base include special-education law and tort-liability law. As laws continue to mandate the behavior of educators, knowledge levels remain at substandard levels. Colleges and universities need to improve the way in which they prepare educators for the task of educating students legally. Resources should be identified and their effectiveness rated to provide educators with reliable information. Data from questionnaires mailed to randomly selected K-12 Texas public-school administrators provide ratings of various resource agencies and organizations. Analysis of the human-resource portion of the study indicates that participants prefer to ask another administrators for information, though they understand that the information might be incorrect. (Contains 40 references and 6 tables.) (RT)

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Sources and Effectiveness of Legal Training for Educational Administrators.

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Sources and Effectiveness of Legal Training for Educational Administrators

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Due to the complexity of issues prevalent in the arena of public education, educators must be well-versed in their knowledge of legal issues impacting the operation of schools (Kemerer & Walsh, 2000; Petzko, 1998; Reutter, 1994; and Shoop & Dunkee, 1992). "Educational law is a fundamental and critical dimension of the knowledge base possessed by effective and successful school principals" due to complex challenges associated with the school setting (Sperry, 1999). With the increased and ever-changing laws relating to topics such as special education, bilingual education, corporal punishment in addition to constitutional and statutory rights of students, teachers and parents, knowing the laws applicable to these legal issues is critical in reducing the high cost of litigation.

For the most part, a void exists prior to 1980 regarding the knowledge that educators had about laws that impacted public education. However, as the need for this knowledge increased, the number of research studies has also increased.

There is no mistake as to the need for educators to be familiar with legal issues confronted within the operation of schools. Educators have confirmed this need through self-reflection. School administrators and principals not only feel inadequately informed about the laws affecting public education, they strongly confirm the need to be informed (Kerrigan, 1987). One Massachusetts study reported that 90% of the 142 respondents to a questionnaire felt that educators should have a command of school law (Hillman, 1988).

Perceptions and Attitudes vs. Knowledge

A few of the research studies reviewed analyzed the relationship of an educator's attitudes or perceptions of the law with their actual knowledge of the law. Researchers have attempted to link low knowledge levels with low perception or attitudes of law. Risinger (1989) found a positive correlation between attitudes toward corporal punishment and knowledge of related laws of Texas school principals. In studying the knowledge of Iowa public school board members, school administrators, secondary school teachers and twelfth grade students and their attitudes regarding selected human rights guaranteed by the Bill of Rights, it was determined, not surprisingly, that as knowledge levels improved, attitude levels also increased (Karam, 1993). In addition, "results suggested that respondent groups did not have adequate knowledge of the United States Constitution's Bill of Rights." Similarly, a slight correlation was determined between attitudes toward the law and knowledge of certain landmark legal cases of school administrators in Ohio (Barr, 1984). In this study, administrators had only a "fair knowledge" of the legal cases contained in the survey, citing a total mean score of 7.12 out of a possible 10. Inadequate knowledge was not the only finding of a study measuring teachers' knowledge of students' rights to due process and privacy (Kuck, 1992). A "chain effect" association was noted in that teachers' legal knowledge, their attitudes and their classroom practices were linked. Knowledge influenced attitudes, and in turn, attitudes affected practices. A recent study assessed the perceptions and knowledge of special education law among North Carolina Principal Fellows (Davidson, 1999). A majority of the Principal Fellows did not believe they had sufficient knowledge of special education law. In addition, findings from the questionnaire revealed that

they had "insufficient levels of knowledge" of the IDEA provisions. Results in these studies not only reflect the lack of confidence that public school administrators and teachers have regarding their knowledge of educational legal issues, but confirm the relationship that their perception and attitudes have on their actual law knowledge. Although administrators recognize their weakness in this area, substandard knowledge levels still prevail.

Generic Law Studies

Research studies conducted to measure the level of knowledge pertaining to school law have consistently confirmed that educators lack proficiency in this area. In Michigan, 131 educators tested were unfamiliar with the laws that related to education (Souve, 1986). Also in Michigan, a study assessing educators' knowledge in 11 legal areas found that respondents were "uniformly uninformed" (Johnson, 1985). The data indicated that "educators' knowledge of the law as it applies to students range from marginally accurate to markedly inaccurate." In another study focusing on the knowledge of constitutional law, Florida educators were deficient in their knowledge pertaining to due process, freedom of expression, search and seizure, flag salute and religion (Steele, 1990). Only 33 of 505 Georgia teachers scored higher than 70% correct on a 45 item test assessing their knowledge of school law, including their professional and personal rights and liabilities (Paul, 2001). Teachers in Tennessee did not possess a fundamental knowledge of school law necessary to (1) maintain a safe school environment, (2) protect themselves from possible tort liability litigation, nor (3) understand students' rights on and off school grounds (Moore, 1997). Educators, parents and students in California's secondary schools were "well below a desired norm of educational law knowledge" (August, 1984). A study by Millerborg (1991) examined legal and ethical considerations used by school principals and superintendents nationwide while making important decisions. Findings indicated that administrators often made ethical, but illegal decisions in situations of ethical/legal conflict. Finally, in a study of New York secondary school administrators and their knowledge of recent Supreme Court decisions affecting school practice, educators lacked an adequate knowledge base in several areas (Chapman, 1986). These studies provide a clear indication that educators need a better understanding regarding laws impacting their daily activities of educating students.

Special Education Law

With the enactment of Public Law 94-142, IDEA, ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, special education has profoundly impacted the education of a special population of students (Boyle & Weishaar, 2001). Due to these federal mandates, several studies have focused on the legal knowledge of public school administrators in this area. Surprisingly, with these important laws impacting the education of special needs students and the potential litigation issues at stake, administrators continue to lack an understanding of the pertinent laws mandating specific implementation in the schools. In El Paso, Texas, campus administrators did not have a sufficient knowledge base in special education legal issues, namely in compliance and procedural requirements of the law (Nardone, 1999). In New York State, a study investigated the extent to which school administrators understood and applied the law governing discipline of handicapped students (Bagnato, 1990). Respondents were asked to apply their knowledge in hypothetical situations based on case law. Significant gaps were demonstrated in their

understanding of key issues related to the discipline of handicapped students. Superintendents and principals in Illinois were found to have "poor or inadequate" knowledge of procedural due process rights of handicapped children (Schmidt, 1987). Survey results of responses from public school administrators to questions related to special education law disclosed an unsatisfactory knowledge level with 74% of respondents scoring below 70% on test items (Robertson, 1996). In Ohio, special education administrators were "less than knowledgeable" regarding education related law (Russell, 1990). With the increasing legal mandates surrounding the issue of educating students with special needs, educators continue to lack a knowledge of special education-related laws.

Specific Topic Studies

A few studies concentrating on a specific area of law were located in the literature. One study examined Ohio school administrators' knowledge of constitutional and tort law regarding student-on student violence (Pauken, 1997). A mean score of 25.23 out of a possible 40 revealed a need to increase their knowledge level. Similarly, one-third of public school principals in Virginia failed to achieve minimal competency with respect to their knowledge of search and seizure law (Kalafatis, 1999). Also in Virginia, a study of principals and teachers assessed their knowledge of tort liability law for negligence in the selected area of duty and standard of case, specifically in the area of sexual misconduct between professional school employees and students (Daley, 1994). "The conclusion reached....was that teachers do not have a working knowledge of tort liability for negligence." Public high school administrators' level of knowledge regarding requirements of due process for students as mandated in the United States Supreme Court case, Goss v. Lopez, was the focus of one study in Nevada (Gascue, 1982). Results not only indicated a gap in their knowledge level, but also found that administrators were more likely to rely on school district procedures than their knowledge of the law. As these studies have revealed, educators' limited knowledge with respect to general laws, special education laws and the various specific areas related to the education of public school students plagues the profession.

Teacher Preparation/Staff Development Implications

Several of the studies previously discussed in this review of the literature cite the need to improve teacher preparation and ongoing staff development programs. It is clear that school administrators should be adequately prepared and continue to frequent learning opportunities in legal issues (Carmon, 1982). In a study of fifty-six superintendents in Louisiana, school law was ranked as the most important course in principalship-preparation curriculum (Hardin, 1998). Similarly, Lester (1993) interviewed 80 educators in New York and discovered that most respondents recommended that school law be a focus in administrator preparation programs. In Alabama, principals reported that laws regarding students' rights were most important for pre- and inservice training (Crockett, 1994). In studying the effectiveness of secondary educational administration preparation programs at Kansas Regents' Universities, it was found that additional emphasis is needed in school law (Jolly, 1995). In a study focused on administrator preparation programs in Texas, the effectiveness of state universities in their preparation of administrators of special education programs acquiring the required Mid-Management certification, revealed a need to include and maintain training in legal issues (Bravenec, 1998).

Sacken (1987) goes as far as to offer suggestions relating to the content of school law instruction in administrator preparation programs of colleges of education. Although the need for training is apparent, some sessions offered are scarcely attended by administrators who have many pressures and demands which capture much of their time and attention (Lattimore, 2001). As shown in these studies, legal knowledge is important for educators, thus, teacher preparation and staff development programs must be improved to address this need.

Resources

Access to resources is a critical factor in enhancing the legal knowledge of public school stakeholders. As noted in one study, a significant relationship exists between the information sources school administrators used and their knowledge and ability to apply laws relating to discipline (Bagnato, 1990). The findings suggest that some information sources may provide a more effective means of reaching school administrators. The size of the school district was also a significant factor related to the importance administrators assigned to selected information sources. In an analysis of sources of legal information for New York administrators, resources usually consulted were "generally both accurate and comprehensive, which suggests that the sources were not responsible for the administrators' misinformation" (Chapman, 1986). This suggests that access, not accuracy is a barrier to educators' legal knowledge. To address this concern, Armenta (1999) provides an extensive list of websites accessible for information that educators can access in order to stay current in school law.

Summary

Based on the review of literature in the area of what school administrators know regarding legal issues impacting the profession of educating the young people attending public schools, the following conclusions can be made. First, educators nationwide do not feel they know enough about the laws governing the educational process. A need to improve their knowledge level definitely exists. Secondly, as laws continue to mandate the behavior of educators, knowledge levels remain at substandard levels. Through findings in these studies, critical implications are made as to the need to improve the way in which college and universities prepare educators for the task of educating students legally. Implications for school districts also exist in that their staff development programs should include a mechanism for continuous growth of educators' legal knowledge base. Finally, resources should be identified and their effectiveness should be rated to provide educators access to reliable information.

Methodology

Questionnaires containing six areas of demographic inquiry: gender, job classification, areas of certification/degrees held, years of administrative experience, number of law classes taken at the university level, and a self-reported number representing their overall personal knowledge of public school law were mailed to randomly selected K-12 public school administrators in the state of Texas. In addition to demographic information, the administrators were asked to rate a variety of legal resources by cost, ease of access, readability, relevance, and accuracy. Types of legal resources included in this study were electronic web-sites, human resources, journals/newsletters, professional organizations, and professional conferences.

Participants were also asked to rate themselves in 14 special areas of legal knowledge. (The rating scale for all dependent variables ranged from 1-5 with 5 being the highest rating and 1 being the lowest.)

Researchers had intended to use analysis of variance to test the results of this study, but few responses in critical categories did not allow for post hoc evaluation. Therefore, the results of this study were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Disaggregation by Dependent Variable

Within the electron/web-site resource group, Lexis Nexis ($n = 3$) had an overall mean of 4.3, and was consistently ranked in the lower half of electronic resources for all areas tested. West Law ($n = 4$) was the lowest rated electronic resource in the areas of accessibility, readability, relevance, and accuracy. With a mean score of $M = 3.5$, West Law was ranked as the least valuable electronic resource. The small number of persons ($n = 3$, $n = 4$ respectively) reporting use of these two electronic resources may have had an adverse affect on the importance of these means. The low number of persons reporting use of the AASA web page ($n = 5$) may also have had an effect on the AASA's overall mean and rankings. However, the low response rate for these three electronic resources, West Law, Lexis-Nexis, and AASA, may be indicative of their limited usefulness to Texas public school administrators.

Of the remaining six electronic resources tested, the TEA website ($n = 53$) has the highest number of reported users (78%). However, the individual means for accessibility ($M = 4.4$), readability ($M = 4.4$), relevance ($M = 4.4$), and accuracy ($M = 4.5$) do not combine to place this electronic resource among the most valued electronic resources tested. Within the category of electronic websites, those representing Texas based professional organizations (TASB, TASA, and TASSP) consistently ranked higher than the electronic websites generated by national organizations (ASCD and NASSP).

Table 1
Mean Scores and Ranking for Electronic Resources

	Respondents		Cost		Accessibility		Readability		Relevance		Accuracy		
Electronic Sources	Avg # of Respondents per Resource	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Grand Mean
West Law	4	8	xx	x	3.5	9	3.5	9	3.5	9	3.5	9	3.5
Lexis-Nexis	3	9	xx	x	4.5	5	4.0	7	4.3	5	4.3	5	4.3
TEA	53	1	xx	x	4.4	7	4.0	7	4.2	7	4.5	3	4.3
TASB	35	2	xx	x	4.7	1	4.3	3	4.4	2	4.7	1	4.5
TASA	30	3	xx	x	4.7	1	4.3	3	4.5	1	4.6	2	4.5
AASA	5	7	xx	x	4.6	3	4.1	6	4.3	5	4.1	8	4.3
NASSP	18	6	xx	x	4.5	5	4.3	3	4.2	7	4.3	5	4.3
ASCD	20	5	xx	x	4.4	7	4.4	1	4.4	2	4.3	5	4.4
TASSP	25	4	xx	x	4.6	3	4.4	1	4.4	2	4.4	4	4.4

* xx Participants were not asked to rate these resources for cost as most of them have free web access.

Of the five resources listed in the "Human Resources" section of the survey, attorneys had the highest number of respondents ($n = 43$). Attorneys ranked high in accuracy ($M = 4.6$), and relevance ($M = 4.6$). Attorneys, however, were perceived to be costly ($M = 3.6$) and somewhat difficult to understand ($M = 4.1$).

The Human Resource with the highest grand mean is "Another Administrator" ($n = 38$). In this study, other administrators were seen to be the most accessible human resource ($M = 4.5$) and the most cost effective ($M = 4.7$) human resource. The data from this study does indicate that legal information obtained from administrators was rated as having a low accuracy rate ($M = 4.0$).

Nine of the 68 study participants reported that liaisons with staff at the Educational Service Centers (ESC) were exceptional (scores of 5 in all areas). Most participants, however, had mixed ratings for the ESCs and one participant wrote that the ESC was of "no help" in addressing legal issues. Overall, the staff members at the ESCs were scored at $M = 3.9$ making it the second lowest ranked human resource for legal information.

The grand mean for Private Consultant ($M = 2.8$) lies considerably outside the range of the other Human Resource components [attorney ($M = 4.1$), another administrator ($M = 4.4$), ESC staff ($M = 3.9$) and Texas Education Association staff ($M = 4.2$)]. Participants in this study rated Private Consultants especially low in the areas of cost ($M = 2.2$) and accuracy ($M = 3.0$). Private Consultants ranked last in all five areas tested.

Table 2
Mean Scores and Rankings for Human Resources

	Respondents		Cost		Accessibility		Readable		Relevance		Accuracy		
Human Resources	Number of Respondents per Resource	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Grand Mean
Attorney	43	1	3.6	4	3.9	3	4.1	3	4.4	1	4.6	1	4.1
Another Administrator	38	4	4.7	1	4.5	1	4.3	1	4.4	1	4.0	4	4.4
ESC	43	1	4.0	3	3.7	4	3.8	4	3.9	4	4.1	3	3.9
TEA	39	3	4.3	2	4.0	2	4.2	2	4.1	3	4.3	2	4.2
Private Consultant	10	5	2.2	5	2.8	5	3.1	5	3.6	5	3.0	5	2.8

Within the journal/newsletter category, 29 participants provided information pertinent to the Texas, attorney-generated newsletter, "Law Dawg". This newsletter rated especially high in the areas of readability ($M = 4.8$) and relevance ($M = 4.8$). In all areas tested the "Law Dawg" was ranked first. With mean scores of 4.5 in the areas of cost, accessibility, readability and relevance, the journals "Educational Leadership" ($n = 19$) and "Kappan" ($n = 16$) were the next highest ranked journals. The low number of participants who indicate use of the" School Law Reporter" ($n = 6$) as a source of legal information coupled with the low ratings for each of the variables for this journal [cost ($M = 3.7$), accessibility ($M = 3.9$), readability ($M = 3.7$), relevance ($M = 4.0$), and accuracy ($M = 4.0$)] would indicate limited usefulness of this journal to Texas administrators.

Two participants wrote in the newsletter, "Texas Education News", and rated it highly in all areas except cost.

Table 3
Mean Scores and Rankings for Journals and Newletters

	Respondents	Cost	Accessibility	Readability	Relevance	Accuracy	

Journals	Avg # of Respondents per group	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Grand Mean
American School Board Journal	11	5	3.9	5	4.5	2	4.5	2	43	5	4.2	4	4.3
Law Reporter	6	6	3.7	6	3.9	6	3.7	6	4.0	6	4.0	6	3.8
Educ Ldrshp	19	2	4.5	1	4.5	2	4.5	2	4.5	2	4.5	2	4.5
Kappan	16	3	4.5	1	4.5	2	4.5	2	4.5	2	4.2	4	4.4
Educ Wk	14	4	4.4	4	4.2	5	4.3	5	4.4	4	4.3	3	4.3
Law Dawg	29	1	4.5	1	4.7	1	4.8	1	4.8	1	4.7	1	4.7

Of the sixty-eight participants in this study, 16 respondents (23.5%) reported attending professional conferences sponsored by the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP). Respondents who attended the TASSP conference rated it highly [cost ($M = 4.7$), accessibility ($M = 5.0$), readability ($M = 5.0$), relevance ($M = 5.0$), and accuracy ($M = 5.0$)]. Few participants reported attending national conferences, but of those who did report attendance at national conferences [NASSP ($n = 2$); NAESP ($n = 2$) and ELA ($n = 4$)], the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) had the highest rating in the areas of cost ($M = 4.7$), accessibility ($M = 5.0$), readability ($M = 5.0$) and accuracy ($M = 5.0$).

Table 4
Mean Scores and Rankings for Professional Conferences

	Respondents		Cost		Accessibility		Readability		Relevance		Accuracy		
Professional Conferences	Avg # of Respondents per group	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Grand Mean
ELA	4	2	3.8	4	4.0	4	3.8	4	4.0	4	4.0	3	3.9
NASSP	2	3	4.7	1	5.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	1	5.0	1	4.9
NAESP	2	3	4.3	2	4.5	3	4.0	3	4.5	3	4.0	3	4.3
TASSP	16	1	4.7	1	4.7	2	4.9	2	4.8	2	4.9	2	4.8

Forty percent of the respondents ($n = 27$) report obtaining legal information through their membership in the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals. With the exception of the ASCD ($n = 25$) and NASSP ($n = 14$) participants obtained less legal information from national organizations than from state organizations. Less than 6% of the participants report obtaining legal information from the national organizations Education Law Association and the National Association of Secondary Principals.

TASSP ranked highest in each of the five areas tested and had the highest grand mean score ($M = 4.6$) in the category of Professional Organizations. The professional organizations ELA ($M = 3.9$) and AASA ($M = 3.9$) received the lowest ratings in this section.

This study also gathered data on four professional conferences. Of the conferences listed in this study, TASSP had the highest number of attendees ($n = 14$) and the national associations for school principals (NASSP and NAESP) reported the lowest number of attendees ($n = 2$). The NASSP was the highest rated conference ($M = 4.9$). TASSP was the second highest rated conference. (The disparity in the number of reported attendees may be skewing the results of this section.)

Table 5
Mean Scores for Professional Organizations

	Respondents		Cost		Accessibility		Readability		Relevance		Accuracy		
	Avg # of Respondents per group	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Grand Mean
ELA	4	8	3.8	6	4.0	8	3.8	9	4.0	9	4.0	8	3.9
NASSP	14	3	4.0	4	4.5	3	4.4	3	4.3	6	4.4	2	4.3
NAESP	8	7	3.4	9	4.4	5	4.3	5	4.4	3	4.4	2	4.2
AASA	4	8	3.5	8	4.0	8	4.0	8	4.0	8	4.0	8	3.9
ASCD	25	2	4.1	3	4.5	3	4.5	2	4.3	3	4.3	6	4.4
TASSP	27	1	4.5	1	4.7	1	4.7	1	4.7	1	4.7	1	4.6
TASA	14	3	4.0	4	4.3	6	4.3	5	4.3	3	4.1	7	4.2
TASB	14	3	3.8	6	4.2	7	4.1	7	4.2	7	4.4	2	4.1
TEPSA	14	3	4.4	2	4.6	2	4.4	3	4.5	2	4.4	2	4.5

Participants were asked to self-report their knowledge of law within 14 specific areas of school law. Respondents self-reported student discipline ($M = 4.3$) as the area of school law where they had the best command of legal knowledge. Sexual harassment ($M = 3.7$), personnel ($M = 3.7$), and child abuse ($M = 3.7$) were the second highest rated categories of knowledge. Tort was the area of legal knowledge with the lowest mean ($M = 2.5$). School finance, immunization, records and defamation ($M = 2.7$) were also areas of low levels of self-reported knowledge.

Table 6
Mean Scores and Ranking for Knowledge of Specific Areas of Public School Law

Content Area	# Respondents	Mean	Ranking
Student Discipline	65	4.3	1
Sexual Harassment	65	3.7	2
Personnel	65	3.7	2
Child Abuse	65	3.7	2
Special Education	65	3.6	5
Religion	65	3.5	6
Special Programs	64	3.5	6
Discrimination	65	3.3	8
Contracts	65	3.2	9
Transportation	64	2.9	10
Finance	65	2.7	11
Immunization/Records	65	2.7	11
Defamation	65	2.7	11
Tort	65	2.5	14

Disagregation by Independent Variable

An analysis of legal resource categories when disaggregated by the independent variables of gender, job, certification/degrees, years experience and number of law classes taken at the university level provided the following points of interest.

Certification: Sixty-six persons who completed this portion of the survey were divided into groups based on degrees and certifications held. No respondents reported holding a J.D., seven persons held an Ed.D. or a Ph.D., 35 were principals and 17 were superintendents. No discernable patterns were detected within the 32 subscales when analyzed by certification.

In the self-report law knowledge section, persons with Ed.D.s and Ph.D.s rated themselves slight higher in most every subscale.

Experience: For this independent variable, cells of respondents were grouped based on quartiles. The first quartile grouping (25.4%) contained those persons with 0-6 years of experience. The second grouping (24.9%) was composed of persons with 7-8 years experience. The third group (24%) was comprised of persons with 9-14 years experience and the fourth group (26.9%) contained persons with 15 or more years of experience.

The length of experience was related to an increase in mean scores for four of the subscales, the NASSP website ($M = 4.0$: $M = 3.7$: $M = 5.0$), the attorney generated newsletter "Law Dawg" ($M = 3.9$: $M = 4.4$: $M = 4.9$), the journal Education Week (M = 3.6: $M = 4.6$: $M = 4.3$: $M = 5.0$), and the professional organization NAESP. Within three of the subscales, mean scores were high in the first and fourth groups and significantly (at least one mean point) lower for groups two and three [the electronic website for AASA ($M = 5.0$: $M = 4.5$: $M = 3.2$ $M = 5.0$), the professional journal American School Board Journal ($M = 5.0$: $M = 3.7$: $M = 3.6$: $M = 4.5$), and professional organization AASA (M = 4.6: $M = 3.0$: $M = 3.0$: $M = 5.0$).

For the independent variable years of experience, differences in self-report law knowledge section were negligible.

Gender: Of the 68 participants who marked the gender portion of the survey, 54.4% were male and 35.3% were female. Within the gender variable, females rated resource materials higher than their male counterparts on 27 of the 32 subscales. The variables where the means, as computed based on gender, had the greatest range were West Law (male, $M = 4.0$: female, $M = 1.8$), Lexis-Nexis (male, $M = 4.0$: female, $M = 5.0$), American School Board Journal (male, $M = 3.9$: female, $M = 5.0$), the National Association for Elementary School Principals (male, $M = 3.5$: female, $M = 4.8$), and the Education Law Association (male, $M = 3.4$: female $M = 4.5$).

On the self-report section of law knowledge, females had higher means in ten of the fourteen sub scales. The means in this section, however, had little variability and in only one subscale was there a one mean point difference. (child abuse, males, $M = 3.3$: females $M = 4.3$).

Job Description: Of the sixty-eight persons who responded to this section of the survey, six held the position of superintendent, assistant superintendent, or other administrative duties. Thirty-nine respondents were secondary principals and 23 respondents were elementary principals. In 17 of the subscales elementary principals rated electronic resources, human resources, journals, professional organizations and professional conferences lower than the superintendents. Areas of major mean difference were private consulting (superintendents, $M = 4.2$: secondary principals $M = 2.5$), Texas Education Association (superintendents, $M = 4.9$: secondary principals, $M = 3.9$), School Law Reporter (superintendents, $M = 5.0$: secondary principals, $M = 3.4$), Education Week (superintendents, $M = 3.5$: elementary principals, $M = 4.5$), and Texas Association of School Boards (superintendents, $M = 4.8$: elementary principals, $M = 3.5$).

On the self-report section of the survey, superintendents rated their knowledge level higher than did the principals in nine of the fourteen subscales. The areas of law with the largest differences were personnel (superintendents, $M = 4.7$: elementary and secondary principals, $M = 3.7$), finance (superintendents, $M = 3.8$, elementary principals, $M = 2.6$), and discrimination (superintendents, $M = 4.0$: elementary principals, $M = 3.1$). There were no major differences between the means for the knowledge subscales for elementary principals and secondary principals.

Knowledge (self-reported): For this study participants were asked to rate their overall knowledge of school law on a scale from 1-10 (10 was highest ranking). Two participants gave themselves a rating of three, four participants rated themselves at four, thirteen persons rated themselves at five, 11 respondents rated themselves at 6, 19 respondents rated themselves at seven, 12 respondents rated themselves at eight, six participants rated at nine, and one participant rated him or herself as having a knowledge level of school law of 10.

In five of the 32 subscales, the level of school law knowledge each participant assigned to himself or herself as an independent variable had an inverse relationship to mean scores for ASCD, AASA, private consultant, American School Board Journal, The School Law Reporter, and the Kappan . In other words, the lower a person rated his/her knowledge of school law the higher the participant rated the resource.

The overall rating of legal knowledge (independent variable) was consistent with participant ratings on the 13 subscale measurements of specific areas of school law knowledge (i.e., the lower a participant rated himself on the independent variable the lower the self help score in the subscales).

Law Classes Taken at the University Level: Of the 68 respondents, five reported having taken no law classes, 32 have taken one law class, 17 have taken two classes, and three persons report having taken 4 or more law classes. In all fourteen of the subscales on specific areas of law, knowledge was the highest after 3 law classes. There was a trend for reported knowledge to increase with each subsequent law class. For example, in the subscale knowledge of contracts the means increased from $M = 2.0$ to $M = 2.9$ to $M = 3.6$ to $M = 4.2$. However, persons who reported taking 4 or more law courses have lower means than those persons with none, one, two or three classes.

Within the category of electronic responses there was a tendency to rate the subscales higher as the number of law classes increased. There was relatively little variation in the way the number of law classes affected the human resources. However, persons reporting no law classes, three law classes or four or more law classes did rate private consultants higher those who had taken 2 and/or 3 law classes (no class, M = 4.0: one class, $M = 2.3$: two classes $M = 2.8$: three classes, $M = 4.2$, four or more classes, $M = 4.3$).

Conclusion

Within the electronic resources category, West Law was the least accessed and the lowest rated resource. While the Texas Education Association was the most accessed website, the websites for the Texas Association of School Boards and the website for the Texas Association of School Administrators received the highest overall ratings. Analysis of Professional Organizations showed that participants rated the Texas-based professional organizations, TASSP and TEPSA, as the best sources for legal information. Continuing their preference for Texas-based information, participants also rated the Texas generated "Law Dawg" as the highest rated journal/newsletter resource.

Analysis of the human resource portion of the study indicated that participants rated "ask another administrator" as the highest human resource. Paradoxically, participants rated "ask another administrator" fourth (out of a possible five resources) in the area of accuracy. Researchers are drawn to the assumption that although respondents know the information they

obtain from other administrators is likely to be incorrect, they are not deterred from using other administrators as the number one way to acquire legal information.

The range of means computed in the self-reported legal knowledge portion of the survey vary from a high of $M = 4.3$ (student discipline) to $M = 2.5$ (tort). During analysis, researchers questioned whether the low mean scores for legal areas that might be more directly a function of the superintendency [i.e., contracts ($M = 3.2$), transportation ($M = 2.9$), and finance ($M = 2.7$)] were affected by the disparity in the number of superintendents ($n = 6$) and principals ($n = 62$) who responded to the survey. However, as these means are weighted, the assumption is not valid and there appears to be no reasoning other than the participants truly believe they lack legal understanding in these areas.

The focus of this study was to determine the resources educational professionals use to stay current with the ever-changing field of public school law. And, that we did. The results of this study, however, raise additional questions. For example, if districts know that administrators are turning to each other for legal information, it seems prudent for districts to make a concerted effort to increase the legal knowledge base of administrators. Also, there is a need to know how districts are "using" attorney, for example, are districts using the attorneys in a proactive manner to train and update the educational professionals, or are the attorneys "brought in" to defend the district? These two questions will form the basis of a qualitative study whose purpose will be to examine whether districts are making the best use of their legal dollars.

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